

Saddleback Valley News

The Orange County Register

Lake Forest / Laguna Hills Edition

Friday, April 1, 2005

WORKING AWAY: Crews work in front of the Bakers Square on El Toro Road where a painted "Open during construction" reminds drivers the restaurant did not close during the expansion.

RITA FREEMAN,
THE NEWS



"When the exits were closed, business was nonexistent."

BERNARD RISSEN
SALESMAN AT PAL'S
SEWING MACHINES AND
VACUUMS SALES



Update: El Toro Road progress

BY RITA FREEMAN
THE NEWS

MORE ONLINE

Join the discussion: Has El Toro Road construction changed your shopping habits? Visit talk.myoc.com and go to the site Communities, South County, Lake Forest.

Torn-up trenches, reduced traffic lanes and closed entrances and exits are deterring drivers from traveling on El Toro Road in Lake Forest. Some businesses on the north

"We've been here for 30 years. I don't think it's going to kill us."

GRACE BJORNSTAD
BELL TOWER FLORIST



"It's easier to go into Irvine when they have the same kinds of stores than deal with this."

TAMI LAZARUS
LAGUNA WOODS
RESIDENT WITH HER
MOM,
HARRIETT



20-50%

Estimated customer loss
by business owners

6

Weeks left to roadwork
completion on the north side
of El Toro Road

Bakers Square on El Toro Road painted "Open during construction" on its side windows to remind customers the restaurant isn't closing.

The Buy "N" Save discount store closed on Dec. 31 after business dropped more than 50 percent.

The \$3.00 Tan salon remains busy despite relentless customer complaints of congestion.

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EL TORO

FROM PAGE 1

side of the bottlenecked thoroughfare are experiencing a crunch in sales and a loss of customers who are avoiding the congestion.

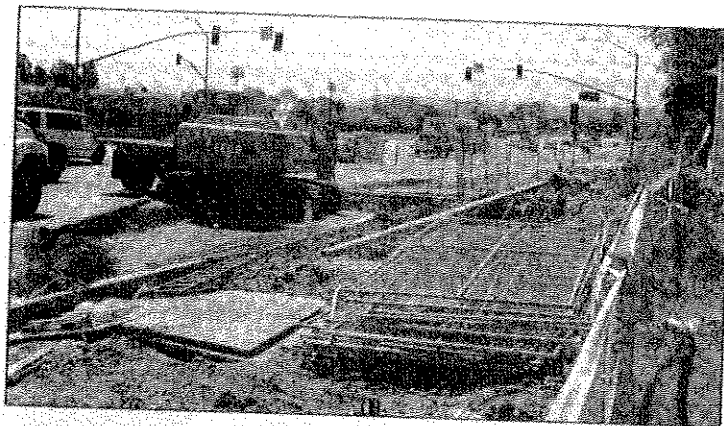
Many store owners remain hopeful, however, that they can regain their clientele and boost their revenue when the \$27 million expansion project – as well as the construction of The Orchard at Saddleback and the demolition of the former Kmart building – is complete and the once-bleak corridor becomes a destination spot in Lake Forest.

City officials say the project is on schedule and expected to be done at the end of October.

"I have every expectation that is going to happen," Bakers Square restaurant manager Esperanza Ruiz said. "They (businesses and neighborhoods) are putting up with a lot. They are expecting it to be successful."

Some businesses owners noticed a decrease when construction started about six months ago. Drivers could not enter into the Bell Tower Plaza in the first phase of construction since the three access points were closed off for work. Businesses also lost phone service for about a week in January when rain flooded underground maintenance holes.

Some stores have adapted to the situation. Socorro Galvan, owner of Saddleback Valley Tailoring in the Twin Peaks Plaza, delivers altered clothing to her clients who do not want to grapple with the



RITA FREEMAN, THE NEWS

PROGRESS: Construction is continuing on El Toro Road.

traffic. Many of her customers are senior citizens.

Galvan also placed a sign notifying customers that items would be ready after 3 p.m. so they wouldn't have to deal with construction traffic.

Assistant City Manager Mark Pulone said progress on El Toro continues as scheduled despite more than 20 days of delay from the recent storms.



"I lost over \$200,000."

**MIR SHARQ
OWNER OF
THE CLOSED
BUY "N"
SAVE STORE**

underground.

Pulone said roadwork on the northern side of El Toro is expected to be completed by the second week in May. Then crews will begin digging up curbs on the south side, where construction should move quickly since there are fewer utilities to relocate.

When the road is com-

pleted, drivers can expect to see an extra lane in each direction, landscaped medians and walkways, and additional left- and right-turn lanes.

Meanwhile, to accommodate existing customers and to attract new ones, stores, restaurants and the retailers are offering coupons and construction promotions.

Still, some owners are concerned.

Saddleback Patio and Fire-side owner Mitch Volman is preparing to enter his busiest season. In the next 3½ months he expects to earn half his annual revenue. The outdoor furniture store owner at Twin Peaks said up to now the loss of customers is "moderate," but the impact could worsen if roadwork is not completed soon.

For others, business is returning.

"When customers call, we can tell them they can get in and out of the center," Bernard Rissen, a salesman at Pal's Sewing Machines and Vacuums Sales and Service, said. "We've got all three entrances, so I don't think it's too bad."